

Syria on terror list, blind eye on PLO

By D Kalb
Washington

WHILE the State Department is earning praise for keeping Syria on its annual listing of countries supporting terrorism, it is being accused by one Jewish group of underreporting the Palestine Liberation Organization's involvement in terrorist incidents.

The department's annual report on global terrorism, released Monday, says PLO factions loyal to Yasser Arafat were responsible for "one, possibly two" acts of terrorism last year following the signing of the Israeli-PLO autonomy framework in September. But the Zionist Organization of America maintains that the number is much higher.

The State Department's figures are contained in "Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1993," its annual survey of terrorist groups and the incidents they perpetrated around the world.

The report, issued at a time when the United States is pushing hard for real progress in Israeli-Syrian peace talks, retains Syria on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, despite intense lobbying by Syrian President Hafez Assad.

Other countries listed as state sponsors of terrorism are Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea and Sudan.

The report says members of Arafat's Fatah faction were responsible for the murder of an Israeli settler October 29, and that an "alleged" member of the Fatah Hawks claimed responsibility for the murder of two Israelis on December 31. "In both cases, the responsible individuals apparently acted independently," the report says.

But ZOA President Morton Klein insists that Fatah has

perpetrated 28 acts of terrorism against Jews and Arabs since the signing of the September accord, 16 of which occurred in 1993, Klein said his group bases its information on news reports from the *Associated Press* and the *Jerusalem Post*. "I don't understand how the State Department could not have had these terrorism reports if we had them," said Klein, who added, "We verify every terrorist attack."

The State Department had little to say when asked about any possible discrepancies. "A lot of hard work went into this report. We consulted as many sources as we could, and that's what we came up with," a department spokesman said.

But this is not the first time the department has been criticized for its reports on the PLO's link to terrorism.

In January, Sens. Joseph Lieberman and Connie Mack wrote to Secretary of State Warren Christopher criticizing a progress report that had just been released on the PLO's compliance with a pledge to renounce terrorism.

The report "reads more like a defence of the PLO's lapses than a constructively critical guide to better behaviour," the two senators wrote. "We are concerned that the State Department report glosses over and excuses indications that the PLO may be unwilling or incapable of completing such a transformation" to live side by side with Israel.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations is studying the latest report and was planning to meet with State Department officials this week to discuss it, said Malcolm Hoenlein, the group's executive vice chairman.

The report says that overall, violence between Palestinians in the territories decreased in 1993, with 83 Palestinians killed by other Palestinians, compared to nearly 200 in 1992. It attributes the decline in part to "a tacit cease-fire" between Fatah, the PLO's largest faction, and the Islamic extremist Hamas movement.

The report says 65 Israeli soldiers and civilians were killed and 390 wounded by Palestinian attacks in 1993. It also says that "approximately 14" Palestinians were killed by Israeli civilians.

On the issue of Syria, the State Department concluded that, despite urgings from Damascus, the time had not yet come to remove Syria from the terrorism list. "There is no evidence that Syrian officials have been directly involved in planning or executing terrorist attacks since 1986, but Syria continues to provide support to and safe haven for several groups that engage in international terrorism," the report says.

It points out that several terrorist groups have training camps or other facilities on Syrian territory, including Ahmed Jabril's rejectionist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. But the report has some words of encouragement for Syria, stating that the country has "taken steps to restrain the international activities of some of these groups." In particular, the report cites Syria's role in "cooling hostilities" in southern Lebanon last summer by inducing the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement to halt its rocket attacks on northern Israel.

Since last September's Israeli PLO accord, "Syria has counselled Palestinian rejection-

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Girl returns from two-day ordeal

THE unbounded joy in Brooklyn last Erev Shabbos which greeted the return of 14-year-old Suri Feldman after her two days and two nights ordeal spilled over and infected communities throughout the world. It ended almost 48 hours of searching and praying by thousands of different people from different religions and cultures. Police spokesmen, the ambulance crew and people used to the outdoor life expressed their amazement at the natural survival skills she employed.

Miss Feldman was taking part in an outing on Wednesday of last week together with 237 other girls and their teachers from the Tomer Devorah High School in Boro Park. They decided to take a walk in the woods near Old Sturbridge Village, a recreation of an 18th century farming village, which was their original destination.

The two hour stop soon went wrong with many students becoming lost in the woods. One way or another groups made their ways back to the coaches. Only Suri did not return. When the alarm was raised and police organised a search, between 600 and 1000 young people, some from as far away as Montreal and Washington, joined the hundreds of non-Jewish volunteers in order to comb the woods.

Many Jewish organisations and individuals offered technical help and supplies of

kosher food which was shared with the non-Jewish volunteers. After a contact from the American Aguda, a concerned motel proprietor in Hartford put 110 rooms on reserve for the free use of the volunteers — a gesture that, fortunately, did not need to be taken up.

Searchers mapped out grids for different groups to explore and on Friday morning one group of police officers found a fresh footprint near a swamp. Police officer John Mulcahy noticed a road not shown on his maps and headed down it with his colleagues. Within 500 yards they spotted Miss Feldman at the side of a tree. He told reporters that he called to her but she did not answer because she was praying. Mulcahy said that her first words to them were: "Are you taking me back to Brooklyn?"

RATIONED

She told her rescuers that she walked the paths of the state park and the surrounding forest during the day and stayed in one place at night, pulling her windcheater close to keep warm. She had carefully rationed her sandwiches so that they sustained her for the two days and two nights she was lost. She found ledges to keep her dry during occasional drizzles. When search helicopters flew overhead, she tried to signal them with the flash on her camera. She had refrained from shouting for help because she was worried

she might attract "bad people".

Commenting afterwards, Chief Kevin Fitzgibbons of the Sturbridge Police Department, said: "We were concerned that this was a city girl with no survival skills at all. But speaking to her I have nothing but absolute amazement for the girl."

She was taken to a local hospital where doctors said she had suffered minor dehydration and scratches. They pronounced her fit enough to travel home in an ambulance the three and a half hours to Brooklyn to get back in time for Shabbos.

She returned to Brooklyn amid the wailing sirens of a police escort and the cheers of hundreds of wellwishers.

Her father, Mr Yaakov Feldman, a respected member of the Vishnitzer Community in Boro Park, who had been among the searchers, was reunited with his daughter in the hospital. From there he telephoned Mrs Feldman to give her the good news. Speaking to reporters he said that he "cannot pay the community for what they have done. But G-d will repay them." He appeared at the American Aguda's annual dinner to give a public *shevach v'hodoyo* for the safe return of his daughter. (See separate story, page 2.)

At the Feldman home on 54th Street, neighbours had hung an orange banner inscribed: *Hodu laShem ki tov ki l'olam chassdo*.

Sh5m grant for Shemita Sefer Torah destroyed in blaze at Belzer Stiebel

THE Knesset Finance Committee has ratified the Treasury's five million shekel grant towards Shemita observing farmers. MKs from Agudas Yisroel have been battling for this grant for the farmers for the best part of a year. The sum, which is approximately £1,106,000, has been won after numerous meetings between Rabbi Avrohom Yosef Shapira MK with the Minister of Finance and other officials.

A SEFER Torah was destroyed in a fire which broke out in the Belzer Beis Hamedrash in Antwerp on Monday. It was 5.30 in the morning when a *maskhiach* on his way to work noticed smoke coming from the building and he called the fire brigade. They soon had the blaze under control, but the Sefer had been burnt beyond repair and damage to furniture and other *seforim* is reckoned to be in the region of nearly three million Belgian Francs (appr. £58,800). A greater tragedy was averted by the prompt action of the firefighters as the blaze had started to attack the wall to the

main Beis Hamedrash, on the opposite side of which were shelves packed with seforim.

Tuesday afternoon a massive *levayo* accompanied the burnt Sefer. On the instructions of the Belzer Rebbe a fast was proclaimed and the complete *Sefer Tehillim* was recited. The mourners then sat on the ground and recited the *kinoh*, *Shaali Srufo bo'eish*.

Divrei hisorerus were delivered by Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth, Rabbi Shlomo Weber and Rabbi Aharon Osher Gross. The Sefer was interred near the *tzifyun* of R. Itzikel ztl.

Envoy told of concern

REPRESENTATIVES of the Board of Deputies held a meeting in London on Monday with the Greek Ambassador, Mr. Elias Gounaris. The meeting was arranged in order to discuss the intention of the Greek authorities to include religion on the identity cards of Greek citizens. The delegation expressed the strong opinion shared by British Jews, as well as by Christians of different denominations, at the measure proposed by the Greek Government. The proposal was causing great concern to the Jewish community in Greece. The delegation urged that religion should be regarded as a private matter, and there should be no requirement or expectation that religious identity should be included on official documents. In this respect the practice of Greece would differ from that of other countries in the European Union.

The Ambassador expressed understanding.

Anger over Jerusalem snub by British Government

By Brian Gordon

ANY one who harboured uncertainty as to the British Government's current position with regard to Israel's control of Jerusalem would be left in no doubt at all by an unusually terse letter received this week by the London-based Campaign for a United Jerusalem.

The Campaign Chairman, Mr Malcolm Palmer, wrote to the Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, inviting him to send a message on the occasion of an event being held in Finchley last Sunday to mark the 27th anniversary of the unification of Jerusalem.

A reply was received from Mr. Major's office stating: "The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter about your Campaign for a United

Jerusalem. As the British Government does not recognise Israeli sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem, I am afraid that the Prime Minister is unable to send a message for your event." It is clear from the wording of the letter and in particular the words "any part" that the British Government places Israel's pre-1967 Jerusalem in exactly the same category as the Old City and the Eastern sector.

Mr. Palmer said "I am quite astonished at such an unfriendly attitude, especially as Israel has made so many concessions within the current peace process."

The British Government's attitude in Israeli-Arab disputes is usually dictated by the Foreign Office which is known for its pro-Arab sentiments.

ROMANIAN CHIEF RABBI MOSHE ROSEN מלך

By O Kaufman-Blumenfeld
Iasi, Romania

CHIEF Rabbi Moshe Rosen, the leading figure in the postwar Jewish community here, died in Bucharest on Friday after suffering two strokes in April. The heart of the 81-year-old rabbi stopped beating after nearly a month of struggling against the effects of the strokes.

The news of his death stunned the diminishing Romanian Jewish community, whose members had hoped and prayed that he would recover. He was a scion of the Ruzhiner dynasty. Rabbi Rosen, who had been chief rabbi of Romania since 1948, wielded an extraordinary amount of influence within that country as a religious leader and a frequent envoy to the United States on behalf of Romania. He enabled nearly the entire postwar Jewish community of Romania, about 400,000, to emigrate and settle in Israel. The exodus was unique in Communist Eastern Europe.

Before World War II, there were approximately 800,000 Romanian Jews. But that number was cut in half during the Holocaust. There are now only some 18,000 Jews, most of them elderly, living among Romania's



23 million people.

He maintained an astoundingly strong Jewish religious and cultural life throughout Romania with the extensive help of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, providing Jews who remained, even in the most isolated communities, with kosher food, religious life and quality care for the elderly. He was sometimes subjected to criticism for channelling money to Romania's Communist regime in exchange for providing the country's Jews with exit visas. But he remained steadfast in his efforts to secure

safe passage for the country's Jews.

In the years following the violent fall of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, Rabbi Rosen fought against a resurgence of Romanian anti-Semitism when many in the country sought a scapegoat for Romania's economic woes.

In presenting himself to the Romanian public as a high religious figure, he earned the respect given to Christian Orthodox figures in a country where physical trappings meant much. And in so doing, he enabled the small Jewish population to be accorded a measure of respect and protection it desperately needed.

A few hours after his death, the Federation of Romanian Jewish Communities received condolences messages from Romanian President Ion Iliescu and other member of the Romanian government, who praised the rabbi and assured the country's Jews that they will continue to condemn any manifestation of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

The news of Chief Rabbi Rosen's death, along with the messages from the government's leaders, were broadcast to the nation.

There is still hope in the Siberian Gulag

From Rabbi Yehuda Weissler, Novosibirsk, Siberia.

SOME two weeks ago, I received a very special invitation which would have been undreamt of just a short time back. I was invited to address the Jewish prisoners in a prison colony/labour camp, situated approximately 40 kilometres outside this city.

Two members of the Novosibirsk kehilla and myself were met by Mr. Vladimir Kisolev who is in overall charge of all prisons in central Siberia. He greeted me very warmly. I was even allowed to take photographs. Initially I was very wary, but gradually relaxed somewhat. He opened the conversation by making some very anti-Russian remarks. He was obviously trying me out, but I did not fall into his trap. This was old KGB tactics. He informed me that it is against the law for foreigners to enter the prison, and none have ever done so, but in my official capacity as Chief Rabbi of Novosibirsk, he was prepared to make an exception.

This particular prison has about 700 prisoners, of whom 70 are Jewish, all males of varying ages. Some have been there for almost ten years. The prison came into existence some 50 years ago and has remained completely untouched since those dreadful days. Mr. Kisolev claims that all political prisoners and refuseniks have been freed and the ones I would meet would be regular

criminals — murderers and the like.

At my initial meeting with him the previous week, I discussed with him the freedom of religion which now exists in Russia today. This, I suggested, must include the prison camps, and therefore as representative of the Jewish community, I wished to meet the Jewish prisoners and talk to them about their religion.

The colony covers an area of over two kilometres and is completely surrounded by a 15 foot high concrete wall with armed guards in watchtowers every couple of hundred metres.

He allowed me to enter labour camp No. 2, which is one of the worst and most harsh in Siberia. I found it hard to believe that I was now about to tread the very same ground where so many *heilige Yidden*, with such *mesirus nefesh*, languished for so many years — never to be heard of again, just because they were caught keeping Torah and Mitzvos in secret.

Although I was apprehensive, I was not prepared for the sight which met my eyes. A couple of hundred skeletal beings, mostly with shaven heads, dressed in filthy ragged uniforms, many with open sores on their faces, watched me through large staring eyes. They moved only slowly. Their "bed" was a rag on the concrete floor. Sanitation consisted of a hole in the ground outside. The dirt and the stench was indescribable. There is no heating — even in winter when the



Rabbi Weissler (2nd from right) in the prison compound with the governor Mr Kisolev, prisoners and a member of the Novosibirsk community (right).

temperature reaches minus 35 degrees. There were very many guards in evidence.

Although I can't vouch for the kashrus of their *yichus*, a number of these pitiful souls had obviously Jewish faces. Their names on labels across their fronts were distinctly Jewish. It might do them no good if I was to mention their names here.

This scene, so comparable to the sights of the concentration

camps in the last war, will be printed on my mind for ever. Could this, I thought, be the "twentieth century"?

For one moment my thoughts flashed back to Strangeways Prison (or "palace"), in my native Manchester, where the British government have invested untold millions and untold luxuries. Could this be the same world?

Mr. Kisolev went on to tell me that since the collapse of the

Russian economy, there is less government money to support the prisoners who are literally starving; some have even starved to death. Fearing attack by their starving charges, the warders buy bread for them out of the pittance they receive as wages. I told him that I regretted not having brought food to distribute — even a few sweets. Surprisingly, he replied that it would have been possible but not advisable. First, because I would not have been allowed to differentiate between Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners, and secondly they would fight amongst themselves, perhaps even to the death. On reflection, understandable behaviour for those poor broken starving beings after being treated like animals for years.

I was then taken to the prison "Club Room", (a hall with 300 seats), where I spoke to the Jewish prisoners for almost an hour. I told them about the *Asseres Hadibros*, and that however low a Jew falls he will always remain a Jew, and Hashem will always love him. I explained to them what it means to be Jewish, and that if one believes in G-d, one gains strength and can withstand all tests. It is never too late to repent for one's sins. The gates of *teshuvah* never close.

The impact I had on them was clearly visible. As I spoke some were shockling, and others crossed themselves — that is all they know about religion. I then

enquired if anyone had any questions to ask privately (in the company of a guard of course). About 15 of them came to speak to me. Every one of them told me that it is the first time since their imprisonment that they felt that someone cared for them and they had been spoken to warmly and in a civilised manner. Most of them told me that when they are free they will want to find out more about their religion and their origin.

As we were leaving, Mr. Kisolev thanked me and asked me to come and visit again. Is this the place where for so many years those *heilige kedoshim* were tortured for having contact with Yiddishkeit? And today I am asked to return to speak to the Jewish prisoners about Yiddishkeit. My visit to give *chizuk* to these pitiful beings, with *Yiddishe neshomos*, was such a humbling experience I shall never forget it.

It is hard to imagine that just 40 kilometres away, in Novosibirsk, a kosher Shul has been established; there is a kollel where ten *yungeleit* sit and learn Torah *kol hayom*; a request has been made for kosher meat to be brought in from Moscow; a mikvah is in the process of being built; mass *Brissos* are being arranged.

Our dream is now, with the Almighty's help, to set up a school — funds and Russian red tape permitting! But that will be a story for another day...